

# Rubber Boa

## Description:

The rubber boa's scientific name comes from the Italian explorer, Paolo Emilio Botta, which is derived from the Greek word "graceful."

## A Rubber Snake?

Rubber boas are actually not rubber. Its chubby look and loose skin appears rubbery which is how the rubber boa gets its common name. You can begin by looking for a blunt tail and head that resemble each other. On the head are small eyes with vertical pupils. Adults are generally one solid color, their smooth scales ranging from tanned leather brown (the southern population are almost always light tan), to a dark chocolate brown. Their belly is most often a light yellow with brown mottling in some adults. Babies are born pink and slightly transparent and will gradually darken with age.

Rubber boas are one of the smallest members of the boa family. Adults from different regions may vary slightly in size. In the Pacific Northwest, adult males generally reach an average length of about 21 inches with the females being slightly longer.

## Moist Habitat

Snakes need water too! In Idaho, rubber boas live in a very wide range of habitats, as long as there is a water source nearby. These include moist wooded areas, arid desert shrubs, and open pine forests. These snakes seem to be more common where there is underground moisture, although the surface soil may be dry. They spend the vast majority of time under logs, rocks, or underground in rock openings or rodent burrows that they utilize for cover.

They are also widely distributed throughout much of California and Washington, north to British Columbia, and eastward through the mountains and canyons of Nevada, Utah, Montana, and Wyoming.

Rubber boas stick close to home. They have a small home range where there is ample food, shelter, and warmth. Occasionally, some snakes will migrate, usually because of too much competition, lack of prey, or too dense tree covering.

## Sneaky Snakes

Rubber boas are slow and small which enable them to sneak in and prey on young nestling mammals such as voles, mice, and shrews. When boas encounter a nest of rodents, they will eat the entire litter if possible, warding off any attacks from the adult rodent with their blunt tail. Although baby rodents are their preferred prey, they will eat eggs, lizards, small birds, and baby bats. Rubber boas kill prey by constriction and have been observed constricting (squeezing) multiple prey simultaneously.

## Predators

Habitat destruction is a major threat to populations of rubber boas. They are also vulnerable to most any carnivorous predator due to their slow nature and lack of active defenses. Birds of prey, ravens, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, moles, cats, and other snakes are only a few of their predators.

Since the rubber boa is a small and rather slow moving snake, it is more likely to survive if it is less active during the day when it would be easily discovered and caught by predators. Therefore, it is considered a nocturnal creature (active primarily at night). Its complex "cooling system" forces it to be active during relatively cool nights, when temperatures are lower than optimal for the snake.

## Is That a Head or a Tail?

A two headed snake? Well, actually the blunt head and tail of the rubber boa just give it the appearance of having two heads. When rubber boas are threatened, they will curl up into a ball, hide their head in their coils, and stick their tail in the air to direct attention away from the head. They occasionally even make fake "strikes" with it because the bones of the tail are fused into one strong solid block. The rubber boa wards off predators by releasing potent musk from anal glands.

Adult wild rubber boas often have extensive scarring on their tails as battle wounds. In the past, it was thought that the scars were because the rubber boa uses its tail as a false head when being attacked by a predator. Instead, scarring on the tip of its tail is from the attacks of a protective mother of another species trying to defend her nest as the rubber boa consumes her nestlings.

## Live Young

Rubber boas like other boas are viviparous, which means they give birth to live young and don't lay eggs. They mate in April or May and then give birth to two to eight young baby snakes between August and November.



Rubber Boa

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No Footprint  
Footprint

No Map  
Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Rubber Boa
2. **Scientific Name:** *Charina bottae*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Length: 18- 26 inches.
5. **Diet:** Young nestling mammals, such as voles, mice, and shrews.
6. **Young:** 2-8 young; called baby snakes.
7. **Lifespan:** 25-35 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Reptilia  
Order: Squamata  
Family: Boidae
9. **Hunted In Idaho:** No
10. **Hunting Link:**